

‘Not only a source of expenditure but a source of income’: The Creative Industries and Cultural Politics in Britain from the 1960s to Cool Britannia¹

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Introduction

Interrogating the cultural agenda of the Wilson government (1964-1970) seems relevant given the shifts assumed to characterise British cultural life in the 1960s. This paper does so by focusing on Jennie Lee’s tenure as Arts Minister. Besides debates about culture within the government and between it and various artistic communities, the paper highlights continuities (and differences) with later periods and notably New Labour’s seemingly novel advocacy of the creative economy.

Lee’s 1965 White Paper, *A Policy for the Arts – The First Steps*, tallied with Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s modernizing homilies. It asserted that “in any civilized community the arts... must occupy a central place”; welcomed the prospect of “increasing automation bringing more leisure” and aligned itself “against the drabness, uniformity and joylessness of much of the social furniture we have inherited from the industrial revolution”, in favour of “making Britain a gayer and more cultivated country” (Cmnd. 2601 pars. 14, 91, 100). This echoed Wilson’s ‘white heat’ speech that saw in “scientific progress... the possibility of leisure on an unbelievable scale”. It also drew on revisionist thought. Jenkins’ 1959 Penguin election book outlined a

¹ A related version of this article was published in the journal *Contemporary British History* 20.3 (2006).

modern, civilizing cultural agenda.² A 1964 research department paper, *The Quality of Living*, pressed for cabinet representation for the Arts and acclaimed the regional funding case made by the Northern Arts Association. In 1964 Labour promised “generous support for the Arts Council, the theatre, orchestras, concert halls, museums and art galleries” and 1966’s manifesto regarded, “access for all to the best of Britain’s cultural heritage” as a “hallmark of a civilized country”.³

Political interest in culture and leisure was not Labour’s preserve. Conservatives, notably the Bow Group, argued that the state should compensate for shortfalls in private patronage and encouraged greater business generosity towards the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB). From 1967 an Arts Policy Group was interested in Arts Council funding, regional initiatives and, anxious not to lose ground on Labour, a shadow Minister was appointed in 1968.⁴

‘The Biggest Increase in State Subsidy this Country Has Ever Known’

In 1971 Lee told Wilson: “throughout the whole of the arts world, establishment, avant-garde, the older and younger generation, I am continually being thanked for what the Labour government did”. When Lee lost her parliamentary seat in 1970, National Theatre staff and actors wrote to say “future generations have need to be grateful to you”. Even Lord Eccles, her Conservative successor as Arts Minister, paid tribute to Lee and Arnold (Lord) Goodman (ACGB Chair, 1965-72).⁵ For the Open University as well as her Arts work, Lee is today, a “sanctified figure” in the opinion of Geoff Mulgan, a major expert in cultural industries politics.⁶

² *Labour Party Annual Conference Report* 135; R. Jenkins ch.9.

³ Labour Party Archives (hereafter LPA); Labour Party, *Lets Go* 18; Labour Party, *Time for Decision* 17.

⁴ Carless and Brewster; Conservative Party Research Department Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, 3/3/1-5.

⁵ *Jennie Lee Papers*, Open University (hereafter *Lee Papers*), Lee to Wilson, 22 July 1971, Letter to Lee, 23 June 1970; Eccles 11.

⁶ G. Mulgan 196. Geoff Mulgan was based at the Greater London Council’s Cultural Industries Unit in the 1980s and in the 1990s Director of Demos and an advisor to Blair.

Lee emerged from the Government with her reputation enhanced. Working class Scottish origins, radical tone and marriage to Aneurin Bevan, who died in 1960, made her a potent Labour icon and aided her carrying off the grand itinerary of her ministerial post. If the left spared Lee talk of an aristocratic embrace, the subject did excite comment. A standard charge was that Arts spending “is a luxury this country cannot afford”. Other critics asked, “what has your ministry of arts done beyond the Thames and Millbank? We in Wales have not benefited... don’t patronize us by sending a company to play a Greek tragedy here at the Miners’ Institute”. Her defeat at Cannock (a Black Country coal-mining constituency) in 1970 was ascribed to metropolitan gallivanting and theatre-going – activities that did not impress those Barbara Castle dubbed the “philistines of Cannock”.⁷ Nor was the White Paper’s reception unanimously rapturous. Some argued it was more spin than substance. Denys Sutton, editor of galleries-museums-antiquities review *Apollo*, thought it “jejune”, well-intentioned, but overly reliant on (a phrase borrowed from it) “temporary inflatable structures” (*Financial Times* 2 March 1965).

Nonetheless, histories of the Arts routinely focus on the 1960s as a key moment in the flowering of cultural life in Britain and expansion of public funding. For Gray, the creation of the Arts Minister, 1965’s White Paper and relocation in the Department of Education and Science (DES) meant that ACGB expenditure “mushroomed during the 1960s, increasing by nearly 500 % in real terms”. The 1965-66 ACGB report talked of a shift from subsistence to growth (Gray 47-51). The ACGB grant grew from £3.205 million in 1964-65 to £9.3 million in 1970-71. The ‘Housing the Arts’ fund established in 1965 more than trebled by 1969/70. Only 40 % of government arts spending went to the ACGB in 1967/68 – most flowed directly to the national museums and galleries. Total spending increased most sharply in 1966-67 by 45 %, celebrated by Lee as “the biggest increase in state subsidy this country has ever known”.⁸

⁷ *Lee Papers* 2/2/7/4, Letter to Lee, 5 Jan. 1968 and 2/2/7/6, “A. Miner” (Flintshire Miners Institute, North Wales) to Lee, 18 Jan. 1968; Hollis 381.

⁸ White 287-288, 311; Hutchison 171; National Archives (hereafter NA PRO) PREM 13/721, Department of Education and Science, Report on the Arts, Sept. 1968, “A Going Concern”, 1; *Sunday Times* 20 February 1967.

The shift from subsistence to growth was as significant attitudinally as fiscally. In 1965 Political and Economic Planning (PEP) noted how former ACGB secretary-general, William Emrys Williams, had complained of functioning too much as crisis management, doling out assistance to prestigious but needy institutions. This “bread line image” (the 1958-59 ACGB report was subtitled “the struggle for survival”) PEP thought “wrong”: “The Arts Council if it is to carry out its function properly must be a body which strengthens rather than rescues”.⁹ If this summarized Labour’s hopes, it regularly underlined that “no amount of money can manufacture an artist”. Nor was there any desire to be a patrician cultural provider, or “to dictate taste”.¹⁰ The state promoted change in the 1960s, as an enabling force and by reducing its powers of censorship of publishing and theatre. The 1944 Education Act, expansion of higher education and subsidies to Arts premises and Art colleges, did *produce* artists and audiences. But “the most valuable help that can be given to the living artist”, the White Paper surmised was “a larger and more appreciative public”. As a 1966 DES Arts bulletin saw it: “social changes including a better education for all, have increased the number of people able and eager to appreciate the arts while, at the same time reducing the scope for individual philanthropy.”¹¹

This reduction of private patronage was problematic for the high arts. Goodman’s 1967 ACGB Chair’s report noted, “private bounty or investment is now totally inadequate to sustain a civilised ration of music and theatre, of poetry and pictures” since “the government has garnered in much... of the wealth that cultured patricians and public-spirited industrialists could formerly bestow” (Goodman, *Not for the Record* 121-122). The Institute of Directors formed an Arts Advisory Council in 1963. Leading TV art critic Sir Kenneth Clark and W.E. Williams (with Laurence Olivier, Peter Hall and Henry Moore) advised it. Business donated to “The Mermaid”, a new City of London theatre opened in 1958.¹² One suggestion was a US-style tax remission for business donations and charitable foundations such as the Gulbenkian Foundation.

⁹ Political and Economic Planning (PEP) 316; Hutchison 20.

¹⁰ Goodman, *Tell Them* 291; Cmnd. 2601 par. 1.

¹¹ Cmnd. 2601 par. 88; DES, “Partnership”.

¹² *Lee Papers* 2/2/1/3; DES, “Music and the Young”.

Many on the left disapproved of business ties. In 1965 the IOD complained about Salford West MP Stan Orme, who had criticized using art for profit.¹³

Elites

The ACGB was an unpromising instrument for the left. In 1968-69, one third of its spending went on the National Theatre, Royal Opera House, Royal Shakespeare Company and Sadler’s Wells. An elitist vision of what arts were worthy of funding prevailed. Film and photography, the latter “Britain’s leading hobby” according to a 1966 survey, were ineligible for funding until the 1970s.¹⁴

On the other hand, as Travis history of obscenity relates, Goodman’s (and Lee’s and Jenkins’) impeccable liberal sensibilities damned Scotland Yard’s pursuit of pornography and offensive art in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate, the Institute of Contemporary Art and *International Times* in 1966-67: everywhere it seemed but Soho. In 1968 the ACGB created a working party to review the obscenity laws. Its own form of irreverence was sounded, when the Chairman noted that in 1965-66 as much was spent on military bands as awarded to the ACGB.¹⁵ Jazz became eligible for subsidies in 1967 and Film also benefited as the British Film Institute’s budget leapt two-thirds in Lee’s first year and a National Film School was created.¹⁶

Confounding the fear Labour ministers had of being countermanded by Whitehall, Lee dealt successfully with civil servants. Like Bevan, she combined firebrand tendencies with administrative ability. She defended the Cabinet Arts and Amenities Committee against Cabinet Secretary Burke Trend’s efforts to dissolve it.¹⁷ This was combined with political advocacy of the Arts, to which Lee brought the tenacity she applied to the Open University. One argument put to Patrick Gordon-Walker (Minister of

¹³ *Mark Abrams Papers*, Churchill College, Cambridge (hereafter *Abrams Papers*) Box 58, file, “Taste of the Arts, 1955-66”; IOD, *Investing in the Arts*; IOD, *Arts Bulletin*.

¹⁴ DES, “A Going Concern” 1; PEP 324-325; *Abrams Papers* Box 70, file, “Leisure 1956-67 (1/2)”; London Press Exchange Intelligence Centre.

¹⁵ Travis chs.7-9; Goodman, *Not for the Record* 126.

¹⁶ Laing, “Institutional Change” 36; Hollis 280-282.

¹⁷ NA PRO CAB 165/555, Herbert Andrew to Burke Trend, 18 August 1966.

Education in 1967), was that demarcating the Arts rather than merging it with Sport (as the Treasury favoured) “has given the government a lead envied by our opponents and deeply appreciated by institutions and individual artists”. Another was that a small increase in Arts spending, could yield disproportionate benefits – culturally and politically for the government. Lee marshalled this case repeatedly in the spending round, although not always successfully – in 1965 she had to “bully” Crosland to bail out the National Youth Orchestra.¹⁸

The Arts seemed an area of government success, empowering Lee. In 1969 she told Chancellor Roy Jenkins how, “the full consequences of cutting below 10 % increase in real terms is not fully appreciated by colleagues... it would... endanger our good reputation in this field”, by contrast with troubles elsewhere, “when a relatively small additional sum to that proposed by your department can save the day”. Lee warned Wilson in 1969 that spending cuts would mean an end to “making the best generally available”, cuts in regional funding or to Covent Garden and that since “we spend less than any other European country on our opera... all the high Tory gentry would be on their feet, ensuring maximum political damage”. “At relatively small cost”, she posited, “we can maintain a buoyant and optimistic atmosphere”.¹⁹

Lee’s battles were with Crosland and Jenkins, precisely the revisionist theorists who in the late 1950s had urged the left to pay greater interest to culture and leisure, as economic and welfare matters were resolved. Jenkins must have recognized Lee’s case for the merits of a small spending increase, since in 1959 he had argued that, “a government policy of moderate generosity would make the world of difference to the whole climate of our cultural life” and that the “money needed would not be enormous”. Jenkins’ contemplated increase, from 0.1% to 0.3% of budget expenditure, was more than Lee achieved.²⁰ There was also political baggage here – Crosland,

¹⁸ NA PRO PREM 13/2488, Lee to Patrick Gordon-Walker, 8 December 1967; Burke Trend paper, 17 February 1965; *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/1, Lee to Wilson, 22 July 1971.

¹⁹ *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/1, Lee to Jenkins, 10 February 1969; NA PRO PREM 13/2488, Lee to Wilson, 6 February 1969; 2/2/2/2, Lee to Jack Diamond, 10 February 1969.

²⁰ R. Jenkins 1. Lee directed c.0.15% of government expenditure.

Diamond and Jenkins had been leading Gaitskellites, something Lee could deploy when she called on (and often received) Wilson’s support.²¹

Jeffrey thought Lee “never let her own left-wing prejudices show” (Sinclair 145). Though Lee could be partisan. “As the NHS [National Health Service] stands as the most important contribution to the future by the 1945 government”, she told *Tribune* in 1967, “this government will be honoured for what it has done for the arts. The Tories can’t undo what is being done.” Richard Hoggart, critical of the White Paper’s blurring of high and low culture and categorization of “the young” as “raw material”, nonetheless felt it “inconceivable that a Tory government could have produced its best paragraphs”.²²

Section 132

Bevan believed “that only the best was good enough for the workers and was determined to smash open the great houses, their libraries and wine cellars”. He grieved that art was “immured in museums and art galleries”. Rather, Bevan wanted the state to “enfranchise artists, by giving them our public buildings to work upon”. However, Charier of the state, J. B. Priestley, who also had Lee’s ear, insisted “the state must leave the artist alone with his work after creating reasonable conditions for them”.²³

The left was steeped in Bevan’s high-mindedness. Labour’s *Leisure for Living* looked forward to people aspiring to own “an oil painting of real merit for half the price of a television set”. It applauded the BBC for broadcasting classical music and London’s Mermaid and Coventry’s Belgrade theatres in “bringing drama to a largely apathetic public”. The 1962 Festival of Labour displayed Labour’s cultural repertoire: a classical concert at the Royal Festival Hall, international and modern art exhibitions and attempts to commission ballet, all chiming with Bevan’s and Lee’s preferences and

²¹ *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/1, Lee to Wilson, 22 July 1971.

²² *Tribune* 21 July 1967; Hoggart 33-34.

²³ Campbell 69; Bevan 50-51; Priestley 13, 19.

belief in public art's therapeutic value. But as at the 1951 Festival of Britain (a social democratic vision, Conekin insists), a distinction was drawn between such activities and the mere entertainment of a carnival parade and sports.²⁴

Lee envisaged her work extending Bevan's. Labour griped about the scarce use local authorities made of their voluntary power to spend up to a 6d rate on music and arts, provided by section 132 of the 1948 Local Government Act, an amendment Bevan introduced. Speaking in 1964 at Darlington's Little Theatre, Labour's Anthony Greenwood explained:

Nearly ½ the authorities who are empowered to spend up to a 6d rate on promoting music and the arts and helping voluntary bodies are in fact spending precisely nothing – and the rest spend little more than a penny rate... If we are to... meet the challenge of increased leisure we must have a strengthened Arts Council.

A 1965 DES circular pressed local authorities on this.²⁵ Since section 132 was permissive, Conservatives wondered what powers the government had to “make these backward authorities spend more”. The left voiced the same concerns, fearing not *dirigisme* but inertia.²⁶

“Not Only a Source of Expenditure but also a Source of Income”

Lee's own passions were for Italy and George Eliot (rather than Henry James). She disliked opera, particularly Wagner; found the James Bond films “boring – all the same” and was “allergic to football”, especially on TV. That “she wanted nothing to do with sport” was partly a matter of taste and partly to avoid being combined with Denis Howell's portfolio. Lee told one interviewer “if the world was made in my image it

²⁴ Labour Party, *Leisure for Living* 9-11, 23; Conekin. This section draws on Lawrence Black, “Arts and Crafts”.

²⁵ *Abrams Papers* Box 58, “A Taste of the Arts, 1955-66”, Greenwood, press release, 26 April 1964; DES, “Partnership in Patronage”.

²⁶ *House of Commons Debates* (hereafter *H. of C. Debs.*) vol.711, col.237, 27 April 1965; *Tribune* 21 July 1967.

would be perfect”, but generally suppressed such instincts in favour of emphasizing her “function is merely a permissive one”.²⁷

In what was touted as a technocratic government of experts replacing an aged, gentrified Toryism, Lee was an avowed amateur when it came to the Arts, and senior too at 60. This facilitated her ability to press the Arts’ case without seeming to infer taste judgments. Lee played the populist, concerned for the audience and visitor as much as producer or performer in insisting on “improved *restaurant facilities* at the British Museum” and “the enlivening of the *atmosphere* of the great museums and galleries”.²⁸

Lee made a virtue of her amateurism, contrasting her approach to André Malraux, French Minister of Cultural Affairs (1960-69), an old radical like Lee and writer on art. “We are not French”, Lee explained in 1966, “we are our own empirical selves”.²⁹ French regional policy was more *etatiste* than British. *Temples (maisons) de la culture* were funded by state and municipalities – though reportedly attracted few workers (*The Times* 11 October 1971). West German regions received more generous business support. Except in Bavaria, lower taxes were levied on artists and Munich invested as much in the Arts as the annual ACGB budget. West German audiences were larger – helped by the tradition of the *Volksbühne*, with cheaper tickets for workers. But US federal spending was lower than Britain’s – if with tax concessions for private donations to state arts bodies.³⁰

The Wilson government’s Arts policy aimed to provide support more than direction and, like the BBC, to do so at “arms length”. But as with the BBC’s Reithian ethos, culture was conceived as a cohesive force, overcoming social divisions through a common national identity. This had been the purpose of the innovations during the Second World War like the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts

²⁷ *Evening News* 25 May 1966; NA PRO CAB 165/555, Note for record, 2 Nov. 1964; *Sunday Times* 20 February 1967.

²⁸ *Lee Papers* 2/2/1/4(2), “The Success of Government Policy for the Arts”, n.d., c.1967.

²⁹ *Sunday Times* 20 February 1967; *Lee Papers* 4/1/2/7, BBC Press Release, 19 March 1966; J.S. Harris 63; Marwick 186-189.

³⁰ *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/2, K. Jefferys, “The Arts in the Federal Republic of Germany”, 2 June 1971; NA PRO PREM 13/2488, K. Jefferys, “International Comparisons”, 30 Jan. 1969.

(CEMA) that marked the state's formal incursion into cultural realms. The White Paper saw exclusion "from the best of our cultural heritage as damaging to the privileged minority as to the under-privileged majority".³¹

Increased spending was induced by the belief the Arts were a remedy for social problems. As Goodman put it, "a dose of culture could turn hooligans into citizens". The Arts might, Lee (like Matthew Arnold) imagined, fill a spiritual void in a secular society. Or there was the prospect, as John Maynard Keynes outlined as Chair in the ACGB's first report, that as economic problems receded, "the heart and head will be occupied... by our real problems... of life and human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion".³²

This was Lee's defence for public spending on minority, elite pastimes – that improving access to them might have a cultivating trickle-down effect or therapeutic value, combating commercial, mass, American, popular culture. Lee contended: "before we arrogantly say that any group of our citizens are not capable of appreciating the best in the arts, let us make absolutely certain that we have put the best within their reach". Lee revived the National Theatre, dormant since 1949 and the White Paper aspired to bridge cultural gaps, noting how "in... jazz the process has already happened; highbrow and lowbrow have met". Her proudest achievements were 26 branches of the National Film Institute, 125 Art Centres and 36 regional theatres. Audience creation saw rising attendances at concerts, exhibitions and libraries. Local government library spending increased, partly as Boots' and Smiths' lending libraries closed. It also prompted an author's revolt by 1969 at Lee's failure to institute a public lending rights scheme of royalties for those whose books were borrowed.³³

Change of the sorts Lee desired could be detected in broadcasting. Local radio, corresponding with Lee's regionalism, started in 1967 with BBC Radio Leicester. *Monitor*, BBC1's Arts series won audiences of three million, as did *Omnibus*, its

³¹ On CEMA, ABCA, ENSA, Minihan 238. Cmnd. 2601 par.99.

³² Goodman in G. Mulgan 207; DES, "A Going Concern", 1968, 4; *Evening News* 25 May 1966; Keynes in H. Jenkins 41.

³³ *H. of C. Debs.* vol. 711, cols. 294-295, 27 April 1965. Cmnd.2601 par. 71. *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/1, 1969 May Day Concert; Laing 81, 84; Weight 390; *The Times* 15 February 1969.

successor from 1965. Commercial broadcasting saw Sir Kenneth Clark make 48 Arts programmes for Anglia Television from the 1950s.³⁴ Programming like this, socially aware TV drama and BBC2 (partly through Open University programming), assuaged fears of Americanization and saw the left surmount the hostility it had towards TV in the 1950s, coming to regard it more as a cultural protagonist than a threat in itself.

Another rationale for Arts policy, Lee told the Royal Academy in 1970, was that “the arts are not only a source of expenditure but also a source of income... income from tourists next year will have reached the six hundred million pounds mark”. Tourism was increasingly a government concern. London hotel developers claimed subsidies under a Wilson initiative. Crosland’s prudence at education became more generous (particularly towards the National Film School) at the Department of Trade and Industry.³⁵

In 1966 Lee argued artists “are not essentially takers... they are givers”. In this context, Wilson’s award of MBEs to The Beatles in 1965 denoted more than a courting of popular opinion. Though it certainly denoted this quality – witness Wilson’s use of *Steptoe and Son*’s Harry H. Corbett (a TV émigré from Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop) during the 1964 election and at the Festival of Labour, where he presented *Coronation Street* (his favourite TV programme) with an export award for sales to Australian TV. A British (and Northern, key to Wilson’s own identity) cultural revival was identifiable. Tangible economic achievement was also evident: the record business doubled in size in the UK in the 1960s, making Britain a global player.³⁶ This can be seen as part of a marginal agenda identifying the contribution creative industries could make to the economy and quality of life, a theme extolled by New Labour.

³⁴ Hind and Mosco 13; Walker 23, 45, 77.

³⁵ *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/2, Royal Academy address, 5 May 1970; Porter 382; Hollis 282.

³⁶ *Lee Papers* 4/1/2/7, BBC Home Service Transcript, 19 March 1966; LPA, Festival of Labour Box 4, “Fanfare” file; Goodman, *Not for the Record* 123-5; H. Jenkins 39; Weight ch.5; Harker 238.

The Break-up or Extension of Keynesianism?

Lee's distinctive aim was regional funding, straining at the dead wood of the metropolitan establishment. Rather than being socialized by elite institutions, Labour was attempting (tentatively) to refashion their influence in civil society. If culture meant the best of the 'high' arts, there was a built-in drag to London – and around 30% of ACGB spending went on London to 1965. Goodman and the ACGB were having none of suggestions that they themselves might relocate to Woking, Manchester or Basingstoke. The "provinces" inferred narrow-mindedness, so reference was to "the regions". Goodman's 1968 ACGB Chair's Report noted that in offsetting Londo-centrism, it was "only in very rare cases seeking to stimulate some local activity where at least the nucleus of existing demand is not already established".³⁷

The state's role was then defined within traditional, liberal parameters; permissive not prescriptive. If there was occasional frustration that the full potential of state agency was constrained, this limited power also provided a useful opt out. Thus, those who felt Exeter's Northcott Theatre should have been built in the city rather than on the University campus, were told by Lee, "you argue this out among yourselves". Not that Lee evaded debate. At Coventry's Belgrade Theatre in 1966 after the musical comedy *Lock up your Daughters* to which trade unionists had been invited, she heard debate on theatre decorum and the desire for Sunday performances ("the very night we could fill the place" one told). Sunday was an institution questioned by 1960s' modernity. Jim Haynes' Edinburgh Traverse Theatre pioneered Sunday opening and Monday closing. Lee initiated Sunday opening at the Victoria and Albert in 1966. A private members bill to legalise Sunday theatre opening was defeated in 1968 (though Lee and Hugh Jenkins got it onto the statute book in 1972).³⁸

In 1967 Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils were created to match Northern Ireland's. The proportion of total Arts investment going to Scotland almost doubled between 1964-70. This reversed the ACGB's metropolitan propensities – CEMA's last regional

³⁷ PEP 326; Sinclair 139, 146; Goodman, *Not for the Record* 144.

³⁸ *Western Morning News* 12 November 1966; *Guardian* 13 January 1966; *The Times* 8 April 1968; H. Jenkins 63-65.

offices closed in 1956 – under Keynes. The Keynesian consensus broke down after 1964 as a regional focus prevailed; the ACGB returned to DES control; and the elitist maxim of “few but roses” reverted to CEMA’s mantra of “the best for the most”.³⁹ By post-imperial analogy, the power of the metropole was diminishing. Yet in other ways metropolitan standards were extended. The ACGB’s focus remained professional, unlike CEMA’s encouragement of amateurs. Lee told the Commons in 1970 that “there should be no cutting back on metropolitan standards in order to spread the available money more evenly throughout the country”. Keynes standards were here being exported. The 1969 Musicians’ Union May Day concert heard in a familiar note from Lee, “that we should be trying to bring the best within reach of all; but at the same time... broadening of opportunities should not lead to a lowering of standards”.⁴⁰ The equation of culture, civilization and ‘high’ Western art held good, just as for Keynes in the 1940s.

Regionalism was not without critics. PEP believed the ACGB should “concentrate” expenditure – London’s 30% was reasonable given its “potential audience” and “international level”. Funding to theatres outside London should be cut PEP proposed. Even if this entailed “hardship for those areas of the country where the level of artistic life is dismally low”, PEP felt, “where it exists it must be fostered... but the present level of subsidy makes it too expensive to create an appetite from scratch” (PEP 329-330).

Eric White, ACGB assistant secretary in the 1960s argued that regionalism was one area in which the Arts Ministry displayed “the character of a shadow arts council secretariat” (White 72-74). Although initiative mostly resided in the regions. “Best practice” came from the North East Arts Association (later Northern Arts Association), established in 1961. He convinced local authorities and business to contribute £40,000, with £500 from the ACGB. Business contributions were no mean achievement given condition of the region’s industry, though annual donations in the 1960s never topped £8,500. The difficulties section 132 had encountered were overcome. In 1967 no local

³⁹ White 311; H. Jenkins 41.

⁴⁰ *H. of C. Debs.* vol.795, col. 716, 5 February 1970; *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/1, May Day Concert.

authority contributed more than a ¼d rate, but 72 of 89 authorities in the region did contribute. The Association's director, Alexander Dunbar, rectified the ACGB's parsimony, such that local authority contributions were pegged to the ACGB's, which by 1966-67 totalled £60,000. Eight of the twelve English Regional Arts Associations started up between 1964 and 1970.⁴¹

Spending in the North East on music, ballet, drama, film, arts centres and transport tripled 1963-67. From October 1965 the Association sponsored a project to use 20 post offices as mini Art Galleries. Postmaster General Tony Benn wanted "the post office through stamps and crown buildings to promote the arts in the community". But it would be wrong to imagine a uniformly vibrant, cultural scene in the North. Postmasters were "afraid... that they would be required to show nudes painted by local artists" and government spending constraints after 1967 hampered local authority and business contributions.⁴²

Another instructive example of local difficulties was the Nottingham Playhouse. Both parties supported civic theatrical development, but the issue was politicized on the city council over rates and whether a new building or a re-fitted cinema should be used. The Playhouse opened in December 1963 and Hayes notes, to be hailed as "one of the best examples of the 'utopian' type of facility for which Jennie Lee had been calling", particularly director John Neville's youth, education and outreach work. Mervyn Jones agreed the Playhouse was a success, playing to 85% capacity at "a high artistic standard", but concerned that its fate had been politically precarious enough to hang on the Mayor's vote and may not have been built had the Conservatives won the 1960 elections. It was difficult for local government, especially in "Coketown" (industrial areas), to prioritise theatre as "what the people want" and required the Arts Ministry to be more strident. ACGB funding was promised only once the Playhouse was open.⁴³

⁴¹ Sinclair 112-3, 133-4; J.S. Harris 104; DES, "A Going Concern"; Gray 69.

⁴² J.S. Harris 105; Benn 199, 237, 302, 309; *Northern Echo* 25 February 1963.

⁴³ Hayes 185, ch.8; Jones 221.

‘With It’?

Many Britons were engaged in an entirely different cultural world by the 1960s. If Britain was palpably gayer in the second half of the 1960s – and for most commentators the “if” only concerned whether this was more cultivated – this was more coincidental with than a product of Lee and Labour's efforts. Although Lee flirted with the élan of 1960s pop and youth culture, talking up “cultural revolution” and “cultural bonanza”.⁴⁴ In London’s *Evening News* in 1966 she enthused:

Youth today isn’t servile any more. They don’t want to fit into orthodox middle-class society. You’ve got your Carnaby Street and your Mary Quant – that’s this country’s raw material – this enormous energy. Off... on their scooters... to some seaside town and start punching up each other.

Whilst trumpeting a “hurrah for turbulent youth”, Lee cautioned that “one of the saddest and funniest things in the world is older people trying to be with it” (*Evening News* 25 May 1966).

The Arts Council had “tried to remain... ‘with it’”, its 1970 annual report explained. But its New Activities committee, a basis for the claim, was itself invaded by radical protesters in 1969.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, such was the atmosphere Lee engendered that *Private Eye* applied for funding. “Nothing could be nearer to my own wishes”, Lord Gnome enthused, than “Jennie Lee’s determination to foster a gay, fun-loving Britain through the influence of the arts”. The editors were dissuaded when it was pointed out the magazine’s anti-authoritarian edge might be blunted by association with so establishment an institution as the ACGB.⁴⁶

Jim Haynes’ experimental Arts Lab, based in two Drury Lane warehouses had ACGB applications vetoed by Goodman. In 1962 Haynes established the Edinburgh Traverse Theatre Club as an outpost of the city’s festival fringe and hub of sub-cultural

⁴⁴ *Evening Standard* 17 September 1968; *Sunday Times* 20 February 1967.

⁴⁵ ACGB 6; Hutchison 106.

⁴⁶ *Private Eye* 5 March 1965; Goodman, *Not for the Record* 287-288.

happenings. Arts Lab followed suit in 1967. Haynes was key to the *International Times (IT)*, a counter-cultural newspaper, launched at a party-cum-rave at the Roundhouse in 1966. Goodman disapproved of the drugs associated with *IT* and Arts Lab. Lee, though at odds with *IT*'s apolitical stance, was close to Haynes and combated Goodman over the ACGB grant. Ironically, the main bankroller of Arts Lab and *IT*, Nigel Samuel, the son of wealthy socialist Howard Samuel, was Goodman and Lee's godson.⁴⁷

Labour's relationship with popular culture was uneasy. Its definition of culture, exclusive of much everyday culture (dress, dance, music), limited its influence in these areas, but also insulated its fortunes from them. Commentators differed over the credibility of awarding MBEs to The Beatles.⁴⁸ Lee admired left-cultural activities like Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and dramatist Arnold Wesker's Centre Fortytwo project, named after a 1960 TUC motion. This argued the Labour movement had privileged material at the expense of cultural well-being and contrasted British with US and European trade union cultural participation. Lee thought it a "brave idea" that could "rescue us from the torpor of a subtly totalitarian culture" and sat on its management committee until 1964. Gifted the Camden Roundhouse, a Victorian railway shed, by Louis Mintz (a Mermaid governor), ambitious plans for an artistic hub were hatched and a funding appeal launched. Despite reassurances from Wilson, Lee, the TUC, ACGB and a Downing Street fundraiser, material aid was as limited as popular interest in Centre Fortytwo and by 1970 the scheme was abandoned.⁴⁹

If more proletarian and folksy in content, Centre Fortytwo shared Lee's vision of professional standards countering mass culture. Both strove for business interest and Centre Fortytwo ran regional festivals to 1962. *A Policy for the Arts*' belief that cultural provision was a right like health or education was absorbed from Wesker.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Green 154, 157, 168-9; Interview Haynes 11 Aug. 2005; Laing 90; *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/2, Lee to Wesker, 14 June 1966.

⁴⁸ Compare Melly 77; Walker 50; Crossman, 1 January 1970, in Howard 603.

⁴⁹ *TUC Congress Report* 435-438; Wesker ch.2; *Encounter* 95-6; *Arnold Wesker Papers*, University of Texas at Austin, USA, 146/10, Wilson to Wesker, 6 Jan. 1965, Lee to Wesker 7 Jan. 1967.

⁵⁰ Coppieters 38; Cmnd. 2601 par. 98; *Wesker Papers* 137/4, "Draft Appeal for funds and the 1962 series of People's Festivals", c.1963/4.

But after 1964, Centre Fortytwo was a negative reference point, rapt in the Roundhouse, it retreated to London and was overrun by the counter-culture, diminishing its funding profile. Lee did not contemplate Britain's cultural life being moulded in the left's own image.

As the ACGB's historian Andrew Sinclair argues, "the collapse of Centre Fortytwo showed the independence of the Arts Council" and that if "a common culture were to be created and spread to most communities, only state grants could do it". Otherwise, Sinclair worried, "the consumer culture of the young would pullulate in its many contradictions, or the virus of the... 'counter-culture'". True, Centre Fortytwo lost out to pop and counter-culture. But Labour did little to hamper pop culture and for many it, rather than state projects, made for a gayer Britain. As Centre Fortytwo's artistic director, who resigned in 1968 on the grounds that social change had undermined its premise that class divided cultural life, explained: "new theatres, dance groups, bands, newspapers and fashion... there was nothing to stop the avalanche, helped by the Labour Government".⁵¹

It was not, as PEP pessimistically suggested in 1965, that "the appetite for culture in this country is less voracious than many of us pretend", but that changing popular aspirations competed with and limited the impact of Labour and the ACGB's ambitions for popular participation in the arts (PEP 329-330). All around new forms flourished and the common national culture was increasingly diverse.

Wilson and New Labour's Heritage

Labour was a convinced advocate of traditional elite culture, liberal and inclusive in purpose. It regarded it as civilizing, uplifting and a barrier to commercial mass culture. Lee's efforts in the 1960s involved a belief in the moral value and uses of culture and a desire to infuse Britons with it; a populist awareness of its commercial potential; focus on its consumers and audience besides producers and artists; the state as enabler rather

⁵¹ Sinclair 150, 147; *Wesker Papers* 137/4, V. Elyashiv, 21 January 1968.

than deliverer. These were also sources for New Labour's take on creative enterprise. Labour's traditionalism in the 1960s contained traces of what by the 1990s was seen as a more modern approach and interest in what were termed creative and cultural industries.

This shift can be traced through notions of heritage. In the 1970s and 1980s *The Heritage Industry* had been glumly tied to "a climate of national decline", preservative not innovative or progressive and a more-or-less conservative version of national identity. But it was increasingly read as evidence of a healthy historical consciousness; not confined to grand houses and galleries, but including popular pasts. In that case it was a marker of post-industrial consumption patterns – heritage and modernity were not opposed but twinned, not least as a creative enterprise.⁵²

Alongside if less pronounced than Labour's rhetoric of modernity in areas such as housing and planning, was one of conserving and democratizing access to worthy traditions and institutions. The two were not necessarily at odds. In 1935 Hugh Dalton wrote that "the National Trust is... practical socialism in action" and that, "a Labour government should give it every encouragement". As Chancellor, Dalton's 1946 National Land Fund did that, freeing from death duties land and property bequeathed to the Trust and extending its holdings.⁵³ Centre Fortytwo received £2,000 from the Trust's Historic Buildings Council for the Roundhouse in 1967. The dramas of evolution to a post-industrial society can be viewed in the Roundhouse's transition from Victorian industry to Arts Centre (like Haynes' Arts Lab, or latterly Tate Modern). Lee's White Paper proposed "a historic building can be adapted at comparatively little cost – certainly less than the cost of a new centre" and thereby "two objects are achieved in one". Besides the Roundhouse, Temple Newsam (Leeds City Council), Corsham Court in Wiltshire (Bath Academy of Art) were cited as examples, as was the Institute of Contemporary Art's use of Nash House in the later 1960s. As the Nottingham Playhouse and National Theatre evinced, new building was politically thornier. A neglected feature of the Wilson government – at the time for

⁵² Hewison; Corner and Harvey.

⁵³ Dalton 292-293. Dalton was President of the Ramblers' Association, 1948-50.

contradicting the dominant technological (if not planning) rhetoric, after because of the conservative connotations of “heritage” – was its preservation legislation, notably the 1967 Civic Amenities Act and 1968 Town and Country Planning Act.⁵⁴

Lee’s activities and outlook can then be framed by reference to Dalton and 1940s’ planning besides inherited liberal-elitist traditions of cultural thought. They might also be read as a progenitor of purportedly distinctive New Labour traits. Wrapping itself in the entrepreneurial veneer of the cultural industries, New Labour chilled to ‘Cool Britannia’, surfed the IT heat of the knowledge economy and sought to re-brand Britain as “the creative workshop of the world”. Culture Secretary Chris Smith’s *Creative Britain* typified this (derided) exercise.⁵⁵ Besides distancing itself from trade unionism, what differentiated New Labour from old ‘Labourism’ were such affinities. Some 1960s evidence hints at New Labour’s creative tendencies, questioning whether old ‘Labourism’ was as narrowly focused as New Labour ideologues like Mulgan or other proponents of the ‘Labourism’ concept have it.

In 1971 Labour felt the Arts was a legacy with which it could attack Edward Heath. Lord Eccles’ proposed introduction of museum entrance fees was denounced as an attack on “our heritage” as, “the British Museum... is a British monument like the National Gallery... we know that whenever and wherever the need arises to refresh ourselves with the priceless collections which are our birthright, we can freely visit these”. Heath retorted by asking why visitors should not contribute to an institution’s upkeep and noting the success of exhibitions that charged. Besides support from Henry Moore and the directors of Manchester’s Whitworth and Oxford’s Ashmolean, Labour had Lord Kenneth Clark’s backing. Clark pointed out that National Gallery charges (of which he was a director to 1937) were designed to deter visitors on certain days.⁵⁶

1970s’ Labour governments saw Hugh Jenkins attempt to democratize the ACGB and Lord Donaldson create the National Heritage Fund. In 1975 Labour discussed

⁵⁴ *Wesker Papers* 148/7, “Response to Downing Street Gathering”; Cmnd. 2601 par. 53; *Lee Papers* 2/2/1/3, “Art and Entertainment in the New Towns”, n.d.; Mandler 399.

⁵⁵ Smith; Littler; Bayley.

⁵⁶ Labour Party, *An Attack on the Arts*; *Lee Papers* 2/2/2/2, Heath to Robert Sainsbury, 1 December 1970; H. Jenkins 77.

enforcing local authority arts contributions allowed by the 1948 Act. It was hoped industry might contribute and that a levy on television advertising should “be channelled back to the creative arts”. Campaigns to culturally enliven the Trade Unions persisted. A 1974 Musicians’ Union motion led to a TUC Advisory Committee on Arts, Entertainment and Sport, though its 1978 congress motion still centred on the 1948 Act.⁵⁷ Capping museum charges was revived as Labour policy in 2001, with Chris Smith arguing he wanted “the best of our culture and heritage made available to the greatest possible number, regardless of their income” (*BBC Website*).

In short, New Labour’s use of the creative/heritage industries vocabulary is not so new. Nor was its emergence in political rhetoric New Labour’s invention. Having separated the Arts from the DES in 1979 and slashed the ACGB budget, the Thatcher government awarded a 24% increase for 1990-93, rewarding the introduction of market disciplines. Besides recognizing its tourist appeal, the ACGB was felt to have shed its “welfare state mentality” and increased business investment tenfold from 1979-88, to £30m. Higher education expansion boosted audiences. Though the 1990 handout was also prompted by rising inflation and the spectacle of the RSC at the Barbican running out of money and closing for several months.⁵⁸

During the 1980s a Labour Arts and Museums Association pressed a recognizable agenda. In a 1983 pamphlet the Association paid homage to the 1918 constitution as evincing Labour had long been “concerned with the quality of life”. It argued that like British Rail Intercity trains and “super pits”, the state ACGB was being forced to specialize by Thatcherism rather than provide for all. It proposed decentralizing arts funding; replacing the “secretive” ACGB and that Labour governments must commit to the “preservation... and development of our cultural environment”. The 1980s’ left advocated local initiative and independent production to circumvent Thatcherite control of the state. In hands like the Greater London Council’s, this fashioned a

⁵⁷ Labour Party, *The Arts; Working party on the arts report; TUC Congress Report* 196.

⁵⁸ *Financial Times* 18 November 1989; *Guardian* 29 December 1989; Myerscough; Laing 47-49; Porter 382.

cultural politics, exemplified by Mulgan and Worpole’s *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning?*⁵⁹

Rich as the parallels between 1960s’ initiatives and New Labour are, there are differences. That the Heritage Department (as it had been since 1992) was renamed Media, Culture and Sport suggested a lingering suspicion of ‘heritage’, if also that ‘culture’ was integral to, not separate or superior to other spheres and might be fun *and* edifying. New Labour is more pluralist, less attached to specific cultural forms. It has embraced the market, inverting the opposition of culture and commerce. Excellence for global competitiveness has supplanted Lee’s insistence on standards for edification. Critics hold that this cultivating notion of the public sphere has given way to one more commodified, frivolous and individual-centred. Blair’s association with Britpop and Art (like Damien Hirst on *Creative Britain*’s jacket) was more substantive than Wilson’s ‘pop’ credentials.⁶⁰

Mulgan’s own evolution itself hints at earlier influences (including the Greater London Council) on New Labour thinking. As director of think-tank Demos in (and subsequently No.10’s Policy Unit), advanced a recognisable cultural critique of ‘old’ Labour in 1996: more work-oriented and producerist than European social democracy (as Centre Fortytwo argued); too deferential to elite and critical of popular culture; too fond of the state and hostile to the market; too earnest and lacking a sense of pleasure or risk; too attached to the worthiness of the public sphere and averse to the private or “domestic”.⁶¹ Evidence from Lee’s tenure blurs this easy dichotomy and questions Mulgan’s judgement. But however much Mulgan is playing fast and creative with Labour’s past, such critiques of Labour’s cultural politics have long been the norm.

⁵⁹ Labour Arts and Museums Association; Mulgan and Worpole.

⁶⁰ J. Harris ch.12; Littler 208-209.

⁶¹ G. Mulgan 195-213. New Labour’s relationship with the GLC is also explored in J. Curran, I. Gaber and J. Petley.

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